



Director of Central Intelligence

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Special National Intelligence Estimate

African Famine: Short-Term Prospects, Problems, and Opportunities

Key Judgments

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**AFRICAN FAMINE: SHORT-TERM
PROSPECTS, PROBLEMS, AND OPPORTUNITIES**

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being published separately with
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THIS ESTIMATE IS ISSUED BY THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE.

THE NATIONAL FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE BOARD CONCURS.

The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of the Estimate:

The Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and the intelligence organization of the Department of State.

Also Participating:

The Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army

The Director of Naval Intelligence, Department of the Navy

The Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Department of the Air Force

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KEY JUDGMENTS

More emergency food assistance than was previously thought needed or is currently pledged is required to feed the 14-20 million people who face permanent disability and possible death from starvation over the next six to 12 months. Western food resources are sufficient to meet these needs, although pledges of food aid from Western donors now cover less than half the region's projected emergency food needs. US resources alone cannot meet the full need and must be matched by other Western donors. In the short term, donors will have to make hard choices among competing needy governments until additional budget appropriations can be obtained. Criteria such as recipient government political attitudes toward the donors, recipient government attitudes toward agricultural reform, and recipient willingness to facilitate assistance distribution are likely to prove decisive in allocating such assistance. Coordination among donors, which has been somewhat haphazard, is improving significantly as donor governments become seized with the scope of the problem, and the active efforts of the UN Secretariat and the United States suggest reasonable coordination will be forthcoming. []

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More food aid is needed than can currently be delivered through Africa's inefficient ports and poor ground transportation system. Substantial increases in port discharge rates can be achieved, however, with the installation of bagging and offloading equipment. To expand forward delivery, trucks and spare parts are needed virtually everywhere. Airlift and airdrop operations will probably be necessary. These distributional constraints will keep populations in remote areas at risk, and continuing loss of life among these groups must be expected. []

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The famine in Ethiopia and in other parts of Africa is the result of recurrent drought, deforestation, soil degradation, rapid population growth, primitive farming techniques, and counterproductive government policies. The magnitude of the famine and the numbers at risk have been exacerbated by indigenous government policies, especially in Ethiopia, where large segments of the population will suffer permanent disabilities and may die. At the opposite extreme is the case of Kenya, where constructive policies have minimized fatalities and drought effects []

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Key Ethiopian policies and practices that have exacerbated the famine problem include the following:

- By emphasizing collectivized agriculture and state-run farms and by keeping food prices low in order to maintain urban support, the Mengistu regime has reduced incentives for private farming and failed to keep Ethiopia's food production rising as rapidly as its population. These policies simultaneously reduced foreign exchange earnings and increased dependence on imported food.
- During the present drought and famine, the government has shown little inclination, until recently, to assist in speeding emergency food to the hungry, especially to those in the Provinces of Eritrea, Tigray, and Welo, where insurgents are active:
 - The regime refused, until October 1984, to raise the priority assigned to emergency grain ships in Ethiopia's ports, preferring instead to offload military equipment and development assistance cargo, mostly from Eastern Bloc countries.
 - It has refused rebel offers of "food truces" so that emergency grain can be transported to the 3-4 million people who risk dying from starvation and related causes in insurgent-controlled areas.
 - It has used military forces to block the hungry from entering urban areas to seek food and has forcibly transported some of these refugees back out into the drought-stricken countryside.
 - It has used the famine as a pretext for resurrecting its resettlement program to move northerners into collective farms in the southern and western portions of the country; Mengistu's primary purpose in this program is to weaken the insurgency.
 - It has announced its intent to sell 10,000 metric tons of Soviet-donated rice on the open market, with some of the proceeds probably to go toward the purchase of military equipment. Soviet-supplied "relief" transport aircraft have been turned over to the Ethiopian Air Force, and are being used in the forcible resettlement of northerners to the south.

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Mengistu almost certainly would accept Western offers of additional food assistance for those approximately 3-4 million people at risk from starvation in government-controlled areas of the northern provinces.

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- He would, however, resist efforts to feed those hungry in insurgent-controlled territory—approximately 3-4 million—initially by delaying and disrupting deliveries, but, if necessary, by using military force.
- If Western countries mount substantial efforts to move relief supplies into insurgent-controlled territory and Mengistu does attempt to block these efforts, the Soviets would back him, but probably would not involve their own troops and aircraft []

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Greater food assistance from the Soviet Union is unlikely, even for its client states. The limits on Soviet food production and shortages of hard currency make such aid unlikely, and Moscow has long insisted that African famine is an outgrowth of colonial exploitation and a Western responsibility. If famine threatens the stability of a client regime, Moscow will more likely respond with military and security assistance. []

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The African continental food crisis will continue into 1986 and large populations will continue at risk, even under optimum circumstances, because of declining agricultural production, various constraints on donors and recipients, continuing civil wars, and the lack of meaningful agricultural reform and development. Recurring droughts and floods will continue to exacerbate this situation. In the somewhat longer term, recent improvements in agricultural technology offer the potential of increasing the region's food productivity, but these can be effective only to the extent that they are understood and implemented by African farmers—a dubious prospect barring major changes in the priorities of African governments. []

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The key to significant improvements in food production is a profound change in indigenous government policies to improve agricultural pricing, eliminate state-controlled marketing boards and collectivized agriculture, and restructure economic priorities in favor of food producers and away from urban populations. There is general agreement among Western donors to encourage and require such structural and policy changes by recipients of food assistance, but we expect improvements to be spotty at best in the next few years. One dilemma for donors is that unconditional famine relief—the most common form of emergency assistance—has the effect of reducing pressure on the recipient governments to make such painful reforms. []

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